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HORNBLOWER

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SERMON

Occasioned by the Assassination of

PRESIDENT LINCOLN.

Delivered April 16, 1865.

IN

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

OF

PATERSON, N. J.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

BY

W. H. HORNBLOWER, Pastor.

PATERSON, N. J.:
PRINTED BY CHISWELL & WURTS.
"PRESS" OFFICE, COR. BROADWAY & MAIN STREET.
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Monday Morning, April 17, 1865.

Rev. W. H. Hornblower, D. D.,

Dear Sir:—The teachers of our Sabbath School, who listened to your sermon of yesterday morning with great satisfaction, as expressing the sentiments which pervade every loyal heart, subsequently held a meeting and appointed the undersigned a committee to request the sermon for publication.

FRANCISCO VAN DYK, Chairman.

Robert Dalling, John W. Cortleyou,
Socrates Tuttle, John S. Barkalow.

Paterson, N. J., April 17, 1865.

Messrs. Francisco Van Dyk, Robert Dalling, Socrates Tuttle, John W. Cortleyou and John S. Barkalow:

My dear friends:—The sermon indited in haste on Saturday, the day of Mr. Lincoln's death, can hardly be worth preservation on the score of its own merits. It may, however, hereafter have some historical interest as evincing the poignant sorrow and terrible indignation which that event produced in every part of our land. For this reason, and in deference to your partial judgment, and also because in these times every man should improve every opportunity to enforce the principles which should control the people of the United States, I yield to the wishes of the Teachers of our Sabbath School, which you have expressed.

Affectionately, yours,

WM. H. HORNBLOWER.

SERMON.

"The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places: how are the mighty fallen." 2 SAMUEL 1: 19.

These recent crimes, that fill our land with mourning, are terrible evidences of what some affect to doubt—the existence of the Devil and his active and malign influence on human affairs. Human nature, bad as it is, would be incapable of such deeds, but for the instigations of Hell. These crimes are more than *inhuman;* they are diabolical, they are fiendish; and the very terms we use to describe them require us to believe in demoniacal and Satanic influences exerted over wicked men.

Do not imagine that I allow myself to be carried away by the transports of passion and indulge in that exaggeration of language in which the intenser emotions of our nature seek to lose and engulph themselves. No, I never spoke with more deliberation and a stronger conviction of my own judgment. If any are disposed to retort in the language of Festus, "Thou art beside thyself; the excitement of these horrible times have made thee mad": I will answer in the words of Paul, "I am not mad, most self-complacent hearer, but speak forth the words of truth and soberness."

In simple earnest, I do not see how it is possible to explain the conduct of the South and its abettors in this cruel war, without attributing much of it to the suggestions of the Devil. Their policy has been so suicidal, so opposed to any ordinary degree of human sagacity, so adverse to the individual interests of those personally engaged in it and to the well-being of mankind at large, that we are compelled to look for some explanation of it beyond the ordinary realms of human motive and action. In all that they have done and are doing, we are constantly reminded of *him*, who

tempted our first parents to sin themselves out of Paradise and provoked Judas Iscariot to hang himself in Aceldama.

Let us briefly review the history of events and observe how madly the South has rushed on in a career of self-destruction.

Up to the time of the Presidential nominations in 1860, a large majority of the people in these Northern States were in sympathy with the South. Southern statesmen exercised a controlling influence in Congress and their political sentiments found favor with the masses out of Congress. The proof of this is contained in the acts of Congress itself, and in the results of the Presidential elections. It is, therefore, fair to presume, that the South could in 1860, if they had wished it, have elected their own candidate for President whoever he had been. Had they proposed Jefferson Davis himself, on any terms the North could possibly have accepted, northern votes would have placed him in the chair of our Chief Magistrate. Certainly, Jefferson Davis, who had been conspicuously before the public and was known to be a man of great ability and was regarded with much esteem and confidence, would have triumphed in a popular election over Abraham Lincoln, who was then a stranger to the great mass of the American people and was awkwardly introduced to them as a Western politician, "a village lawyer," and erst an honest rail-splitter!*

The substitution of such a man for Wm. H. Seward seemed absurd: and nothing could have secured his election but the fatal policy adopted by the South. The South compelled us to elect Mr. Lincoln by a popular vote; and then meanly and mendaciously pretended to find in that election a cause of complaint against the North. This it was that first embittered multitudes of voters at the North, who had unwillingly cast their ballots for the republican

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* Abraham Lincoln was already recognized in the North West as the peer in the political world of Stephen A. Douglas: and Douglas himself, I am informed, after the nomination of Lincoln for the Presidency, with a magnaninity hardly to be expected in a rival candidate, acknowledged the great ability of Mr. Lincoln and his entire fitness for the office to which he was nominated

nominee, against southern politicians whose insulting language could only provoke resentment and implacable hatred.

Each successive step taken by the South affords new evidence that they were incited and beguiled to their own ruin by satanic agencies. Had they asked for a convention of States, a constitutional remedy for any real or supposed evils, or even for a peaceable separation, there is reason to believe that they might have obtained all they desired. Even after they had added injury to insult, had violently wrenched themselves from our Federal Union, seized our common property, and roused a spirit of indignation throughout the whole land, there was still a disposition among our people to 'leave them alone' to their own wayward devices. Even then, they could, I think, have secured the assistance of a large and influential party at the North in the consummation of their designs. They could have avoided the *only* course that was *certain* to end in self-destruction.

What shall we call the infatuation that made them choose that one course, to fire on our flag,—(we at the North could not believe it at first: when they fired at the Star of the West, we thought it a mistake, an act of passion soon to be repented of; it was not till their batteries opened on Fort Sumter, that we comprehended their real purpose,)—what infatuation was it that induced them to proclaim war at the cannon's mouth and rouse the whole North, as one man to resist, to conquer, to annihilate, if need be, the enemy of our Republican Government? What shall we call the infatuation that led them to proclaim slavery and its perpetuation the corner stone of the political fabric they sought to build with untempered mortar; and thus estrange from them all the civilized nations of the earth, and invite against themselves those weapons of ridicule and derision that are often more effective in human affairs than the assaults of armed men? What shall we call the infatuation that induced them to shock all sentiments of humanity by such barbarities as were perpetrated at Fort Pillow; and in the prison-pens of Andersonville and Salisbury and Rich-

mond itself, and in the guerilla warfare of border states, and in the conscription and persecution to death of their own friends and neighbors and fellow citizens, and in hiring stealthy incendiaries to fire and give up to rapine and destruction our Northern cities? What shall we call these acts of infatuation, I ask, if we do not attribute them to the seductive and provocative power of the Devil? Has not their whole course from the beginning been strangely and admirably adapted to defeat their own aims, to quench and repel human sympathy, to foment hatred and to invite vindictive justice? If we are to judge even the Devil by his works, then we must conclude that the Southern people have been possessed by the evil spirit that deludes his victims to their own destruction.

There was needed but one more evidence of their hellish spite, malignity and folly. To public slaughter must be added the infamy of private assassination! It will be feebly said in attempted extenuation, that the South is not to be held responsible for this, the crime of individual men, either fanatics or demons. But an enraged nation will not listen to this flimsy apology. They will insist that the animus, the devilish spirit of this rebellion, is evinced in this crowning act of horror and wickedness. It is a deed

> "—— to make Heaven weep, all earth amazed;
> For nothing canst thou to damnation add
> Greater than that."

It has stifled in these Northern States the last feeling of pity towards the guilty agents of treason and rebellion. It has deprived the Southern States of the benefit they might have derived from the magnanimity of a generous, forgiving and confiding people. It has kindled an implacable resentment that will continue to burn till every object of hostility is consumed. It has awakened that stern sentiment of justice that can only be appeased with the lives of those who have incited this war and are personally responsible for all its consequences even to these shameful crimes of assassination and attempted assassination. As long as Jefferson Davis lives, this nation will feel that the death of Abraham Lincoln is unavenged. Die he must. Not by the hand of the

assassin. God forbid. But by the Sword of retributive justice: by arraignment, trial and conviction. Calm, terrible, inexorable justice must be done. Not only does the natural sense of offended justice, irrepressible in the human heart, demand this: but the cultivated and Divine principles of revealed religion, that require us to defend and protect virtue and punish, deter from, and exterminate vice, demand it. In the name of Him who came to destroy the Devil and his works, we must deprive forever of their power to injure mankind those who have yielded themselves servants to do the bidding of the Devil. Society is not safe while such men live.

If these words and sentiments are unbecoming the minister of the gospel of peace, I shall be the first to regret and recall them. I can only say that *now* they seem to me not only entirely consistent with the office I represent, but rendered obligatory by the functions of that office itself. It is not private vengeance I would slake: but it is public justice I would execute; that justice on which the stability of empires and the rights of men, the order and welfare of society must rest for support; and without which is misrule, anarchy and social wretchedness.

But if aught is said intemperately, in hot passion,—the cause of provocation is great. Who can be perfectly self possessed in such agony of grief as we suffer to-day. We mourn to-day the loss of one whom we regarded with more than the veneration that is due to the office of President of the United States. We not only honoured him as President, we had learned to love him as the Father of his people.

I have hinted at the reluctance with which many of us voted in 1860 for the comparatively obscure man, whose personal appearance and peculiarities were not likely on his first introduction to this anxious nation, to create a favorable impression. But it was far different when Abraham Lincoln was nominated for re-election in 1864. He came before us then as our own free choice, the man whom the people delighted to honour, the man in whom we felt a confidence that no other man in the Union could inspire.

I have not the ability, nor the material, to portray the character or recount the life of Abraham Lincoln. This will be done. And when it is done, the world will assign to Abraham Lincoln no inferior place among the greatest and the best of men.

He was great and he was good.

It was not necessary to wait for his death in order to ascertain this. Already the world had begun to recognize his extraordinary qualities. In Europe as well as in America his name was already linked with that of George Washington; and with growing surprise men were beginning to discern in this man, who was greeted on his first advent upon the theatre of international politics with ill suppressed derision, those illustrious endowments that have rendered the name of Washington immortal. Even English prejudice had melted and was yielding to the irresistible eloquence of his statesmanship and his more than regal superiority to all that is little, selfish or wrong. I will satisfy myself with a single testimony by quoting an extract from an English journal published in March last.

"We all remember the animated eulogium on General Washington, which Lord Macaulay passed parenthetically in his essay on Hampden. 'It was when to the sullen tyranny of Laud and Charles had succeeded the fierce conflict of sects and factions ambitious of ascendency or burning for revenge, it was when the vices and ignorance which the old tyranny had engendered, threatened the new freedom with destruction, that England missed the sobriety, the self-command, the perfect soundness of judgment, the perfect rectitude of intention to which the history of revolutions furnishes no parallel, or furnishes a parallel in Washington alone.' If that high eulogium was fully earned, as it was, by the first great President of the United States, we doubt if it has not been as well earned by the Illinois peasant-proprietor and 'village lawyer,' whom, by some divine inspiration or providence, the Republican caucus of 1860 substituted for Mr. Seward as their nominee for the President's chair. * * * Without the advantages of Washington's education or train-

ing, Mr. Lincoln was called from a humble station at the opening of a mighty civil war, to form a government out of a party in which the habits and traditions of official life did not exist. Finding himself the object of Southern abuse, so fierce and so foul that in any man less passionless it would long ago have stirred up an implacable animosity, mocked at for his official awkwardness, and denounced for his steadfast policy by all the democratic section of the loyal States, tried by years of failure before that policy achieved a single great success, further tried by a series of successes so rapid and brilliant that they would have puffed up a smaller mind and overset its balance, embarrassed by the boastfulness of his people and of his subordinates no less than by his own inexperience in his relations with foreign States, beset by fanatics of principle on one side who would pay no attention to his obligations as a constitutional ruler, and by fanatics of caste on the other, who were not only deaf to the claims of justice, but would hear of no policy large enough for a revolutionary emergency, Mr. Lincoln has persevered through all without ever giving way to anger, or despondency, or exultation, or popular arrogance, or sectarian fanaticism, or caste prejudice, visibly growing in force of character, in self-possession, and in magnanimity, till in his last short message to Congress on the fourth of March we can detect no longer the rude and illiterate mould of a village lawyer's thought, but find it replaced by a grasp of principle, a dignity of manner, and a solemnity of purpose which would have been unworthy neither of Hampden nor of Cromwell, while his gentleness and generosity of feeling towards his foes are almost greater than we should expect from either of them." (*The London Spectator.*)

And this strong man whom a nation leaned upon, this just man whom no vile epithet hatred could invent, no misconstruction or calumniation malignity could utter, no injurious doubt or inuendo suspicion could suggest, provoked to retaliate in one unkind word or one angry thing, or swerved him for an instant from what was right and noble, and in his judgment for the best,—this man is gone! This great

and good man is dead! Just when he was rising in the estimation of the whole world to the sphere of the brightest luminary in the political heavens, his light has been in an instant extinguished, and we are buried in a midnight darkness, made more fearful by the wails and lamentations of our afflicted nation. May God have mercy upon us. May God send us help even out of the Sanctuary, for vain is our trust in man, whose breath is in his nostrils.

While we mourn for Abraham Lincoln as children for a father, we naturally turn to religion for its consolations, and endeavor to cheer ourselves with the hope that he has passed from these scenes of sinful strife into that Heavenly rest that remaineth for the people of God. This hope, so far as we cherish it, is founded chiefly on those evidences of a strongly religious character which abound in all his popular addresses, and in many of the official documents written by his pen; especially his messages to Congress and his proclamations to the people. We know, indeed, that many things have been related of his private life, which would seem to show that he was a sincere and devout Christian. But we are not yet prepared either to accept or deny such hear-say testimony. There is one particular in which he caused Christian people some painful solicitude. We cannot forget, that, while he was calling upon the people to humble themselves before God, he was by his eminent example encouraging those theatrical performances which good men in all ages and countries have regarded as corrupting to public morals, and incentives to irreligion, extravagance and vice. We are not at liberty, therefore, to overlook the significant fact, that it was in a theatre, and by the hand of an actor, that our President lost his life. It is fair to say, that the education of the stage, where the villain is too often the hero of the play, produced its legitimate effect if it made this actor an assassin, and caused him to proclaim his guilt in the traditional dramatic style, as he sought safety in flight from the very boards on which he had played the mimic wretch he had now in reality himself become. It does seem as if this event were designed in

God's providence to awaken anew our fears and suspicions of the dangerous influence of the stage on the moral sentiments and habits of the people. It certainly should arouse all Christians to set their faces against it and to guard the children and youth of the church against its pernicious casuistry and vicious tendency.

We wish that it had been in some other place than a theatre, with other surroundings than those where the gay and the dissolute are attracted, that our President had received the summons to meet his God. Yet we are not disposed to judge him harshly. We do not know how far his duties to the public rendered his attendance upon such scenes imperative in his own opinion. We do know, that he went, on that particular occasion, reluctantly and under some sort of conviction that he ought to gratify those who had been led by the public prints to expect his presence. We should remember also that the opinions and habits of many good people, unfortunately, would sanction if not justify the President in giving his countenance to this class of public amusements. We do not believe that in doing so, he violated any sense of what was right and proper in his own conscience. He did not entertain those views of the theatre which many of us do; else he never would have been there, for he was a man true to himself, whom nothing could swerve from what he deemed to be right. We cannot, therefore, regard his conduct in the matter referred to, however we disapprove of it, as incompatible with a truly Christian character.

Few public men ever afforded in their words and official acts such abundant evidence of a constant sense of responsibility to God and dependence on God; and we have reason, in this fact alone, to indulge the hope that he was a child of God, to regard as credible and likely to be true all that is related of his habits of devout meditation on God's word and of secret prayer, to trust that the supplications of the Christian people of this land in his behalf were not in vain, and to cherish with joyful confidence the faith, inspired by the resurrection of our Redeemer which we this day cel-

ebrate, that he was accepted in God's beloved Son, is now at rest in Jesus, and shall rise again at the great and last day unto everlasting life and unutterable glory.

But let us return to the consideration of the calamity that has befallen us as a nation; the greatest calamity, in human judgment, that could have happened to us. And what a commentary is it on the words our President uttered in his last message! 'Both North and South, he said, were equally confident in the justice of their cause, and appealed to God to justify that confidence. He has not justified either of them wholly.' "The prayers of both could not be answered; that of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has his own purposes."

"The Almighty has His own purposes!" Yes. His own purposes to accomplish by this most mysterious of all events, the death of the man who proclaimed this pregnant truth to the world. Those purposes are hid and undiscoverable, till God's own Providence brings them to light: and slowly and surely are they revealing themselves.

It is manifestly one purpose of the Almighty to humble this people.

He is calling us to mourning and penitential grief. He has a controversy with us and will not be reconciled till we forsake our sins: till we cleanse our Capitol from drunkenness, debauchery and voluptuousness: till we restore the holy Sabbath day to its sanctity: till we crush the voracity that devours the public treasure and inflames men with avarice and covetousness, to the extinction of honor and probity, and maddens them to gamble in every possible way in which money can be made or can be lost: till we restrain the love of pleasure that fills our cities with theatres, their private houses with the noise of midnight revelries, and their public thoroughfares with the resorts of painted vice and sensuality: till we seek God with genuine repentance, and united and fervent prayers and supplications, and receive the outpourings of His Holy Spirit in converting and sanctifying power on all our churches throughout the length and breadth of our land: till we thus turn again to the Lord,

we cannot expect to escape the repeated chastisements of His rod and increasing manifestations of His displeasure towards us.

Again, it is manifestly the purpose of the Almighty to remove our trust in man.

God has changed our Easter song to-day into a funereal dirge. "How is the strong staff broken, and the beautiful rod!"

Again, another purpose of the Almighty is revealing itself with a distinctness that can no longer be obscured.

God means to root out from our land now and forever the curse of slavery and to destroy the power of all its abettors and supporters. Slavery has been differently esteemed the cause or the occasion of the war. Whichever it is, it has become identified with the success or failure of rebellion, it has been the source of the acrimony and virulence with which the war has been waged, it has made itself detestable to the North and to the civilized world by the cruelties with which it is associated and the dastardly and barbarous means by which it has been defended. Its doom is now certain. There can be no peace in the land while slavery exists. I have been slow, very slow, in coming to this conclusion. I have not believed and do not now believe that the great purposes of the Almighty in this war are fulfilled in any benefit to the African race. I have, too, been repelled by the Infidelity in God's Word and the distrust of His Providence that have hid themselves under the robes of abolitionism and the specious pretences of philanthropy and the rights of man. I had thought that slavery and all forms of despotism were to be terminated by slower processes and recede and vanish as the light and spirit of Christianity advanced. But there is no longer room to doubt or to argue. Abraham Lincoln, with his great catholic views founded in the strongest common sense and his great generous heart, ready to forgive and to bear and to forbear, dealt too tenderly with the great evil that has poisoned the Southern heart and inflamed it, till it has destroyed in its advocates too often all sense of honor and justice and produced the miscreants

who have sought to reach what they could not gain in open warfare by the vile hands of the secret incendiary and the brutal assassin! Abraham Lincoln has been removed because he would have spared those whom God has consigned to destruction. Other counsels must now prevail. The last act of forbearance towards the armed and resisting slaveholder has been recorded. If he will not now submit to the majesty of the law, he must be slain by the law. He must not be spared to hire other incendiaries and assassins, to breed new dissensions and beget new revolutions. We are no longer to extend the hand and welcome him back to all the rights and privileges of citizenship. He has forfeited our confidence. He has proved that he cannot be trusted. Our government can never be safe while he retains the slightest power to assail it, or to plot against it. He must be put out of the way of doing harm: and to this end, slavery must be forever exterminated and all its obstinate and determined abettors and supporters must be disarmed and rendered incapable forever of conspiring against the Government of these States.

Such is the profound conviction that has taken possession of the popular mind. It is another proof that the Devil has beguiled the leaders of the rebellion to their own ruin.

If the murder of Saul, the Lord's anointed, (though Saul died for the benefit of his country; his death was a good riddance to the land,) demanded instant expiation in the death of the murderer;—the murder of our honored President, through whose death was sought the dissolution of our country, demands the death of all who conspired to bring about this event. God who has declared "Vengeance is mine; I will repay," has put the sword into the hand of the magistrate to execute His vengeance and He will hold this sovereign people accountable if they do not insist that the powers that be, who by their election represent the majesty of the law, shall be a terror to evil doers: not merely to punish past offences, but to deter in the future from the repetition of similar crimes.

Again, I insist, that no blood-thirsty spirit prompts these

expressions : but the most solemn conviction that the safety of our country and the welfare of mankind demand this in the name of outraged justice.

Finally, there is reason to hope that we shall ere long see another purpose of the Almighty ripening into fulfilment. The nation, baptized in the blood of their President, will rouse itself to self-assertion and to a final and terrible termination of this war. The blood of Abraham Lincoln dripping down from the "high-places" of the land upon the hearts of this people will cement them into one heart, into one purpose. Last week there was cause for anxiety lest divided counsels should continue to distract our people and delay the final settlement of national affairs. Now there will be but one mind, one determination,—resolute, unwavering and invincible. With a strong hand all obstacles will be swept away. A policy clear and decided will be adopted: and the result will be a speedier and more permanent settlement of our government on the great principles of liberty which lie at its base. The night is rapidly passing away. The day will soon break. We shall have peace and unity, and shall attain national eminence and fulfill our mission to all the earth.

If Abraham Lincoln has died a martyr for this, he has won a more glorious crown than ever mortal hero wore. For this he would have been willing to die. No volunteer ever more cheerfully gave up his humble life on the field of battle, than Abraham Lincoln would have yielded up his great soul for his country's good. But long, long after peace and prosperity have returned, our souls will be overshadowed by the melancholy recollection of these days of suffering and we will sing our lamentations in the words of the mourners of Israel. "The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places: how are the mighty fallen!"

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